
Materials for emergency room physicians

Connect People with Heart Defects to the Care They Need

Did you know that about 1 million children and 1.4 million adults in the United States are living with a congenital heart defect?¹

It's true — and many of them aren't getting the care they need to stay healthy. As an emergency room physician, you can help change this! When people with heart defects visit the emergency room — for any reason — **you have an opportunity to connect them to congenital cardiac care.**

Take these steps to help make sure people with heart defects get the care they need:

1. Ask patients — or their caregivers — if they have a history of heart problems. They may not mention it unless you ask.
2. Ask adults with heart defects if they're seeing a congenital cardiologist — a specialist who treats people who were born with heart defects. And for children with heart defects, ask their caregivers if they're seeing a pediatric cardiologist. If they're not, explain why lifelong congenital cardiac care is important.
3. Refer adults who aren't getting the care they need to a congenital cardiologist. If you need help finding adult congenital cardiologists in your area, check out the [ACHD Clinic Directory](#). Refer children who aren't getting the care they need to a pediatric cardiologist.

To learn more, check out:

- [The AAP congenital heart defects toolkit](#)
- [Congenital heart defects resources from CDC](#)
- [The Congenital Heart Public Health Consortium](#)

When you connect patients with heart defects to congenital cardiac care, your impact can last long beyond their visit to the emergency room!

¹ [Congenital heart defects in the United States: Estimating the magnitude of the affected population in 2010](#)

How to Talk to Adults with Heart Defects About Congenital Cardiac Care

People with heart defects need lifelong congenital cardiac care — but many of them aren't getting it.

You have a unique touchpoint with these patients, whether they're in the emergency room because of their heart problem or for another reason. That means you can help make sure they get the care they need to stay healthy.

Specifically, it's important to emphasize why congenital cardiac care is important — and make referrals for patients who need them. When you do, your impact can last long beyond their visit to the emergency room!

Use these talking points to help start the conversation.

1. Find out if patients have heart defects

"Have you ever had any heart problems — even as a child? For example, did you ever have heart surgery or take medicine for your heart? If you did, I want to make sure you get the care you need to stay healthy."

It's important to ask patients about their history of heart problems. This is especially true for patients with signs or symptoms that could indicate a congenital heart defect — like trouble breathing, blood clots, or a chest scar. If you don't ask, patients may not mention their heart problems. When you learn that a patient has a heart defect, ask if they're seeing a congenital cardiologist.

2. Explain why patients need lifelong care

"Heart defects last for a lifetime — even after heart surgery — and they sometimes get worse over time. That's why you need to see a congenital cardiologist regularly."

People with heart defects may not know they need to see a congenital cardiologist — especially if they've been feeling healthy. Explain that congenital cardiologists can catch problems early to help patients *stay* healthy and avoid another trip to the emergency room.

3. Describe what a congenital cardiologist does

"A congenital cardiologist is a doctor who's trained to treat heart problems like yours. They know how to tell if a heart problem is getting worse and how to help you stay healthy."

Some patients with heart defects may not understand why they need to see a specialist, so it's important to explain what a congenital cardiologist does. Emphasize that congenital cardiologists know more about heart defects than anyone else — including which medicines or procedures patients may need.

4. Tell patients you can make a referral

“I can refer you to a congenital cardiologist to make sure you’re getting the care you need.”

Reassure patients that you can help them find a congenital cardiologist. Make sure you know how to find congenital cardiologists in your area so you can refer patients who aren’t getting the care they need. If you need help finding congenital cardiologists, check out the ACHD Clinic Directory at: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory

To learn more, check out:

- aap.org/CHDcare
- cdc.gov/heartdefects
- chphc.org

How to Talk to Parents and Caregivers About Congenital Cardiac Care for Children with Heart Defects

Children with heart defects need to see a pediatric cardiologist regularly. As an emergency room physician, you can help make sure they do.

Specifically, it's important to tell parents and caregivers why children need to see a pediatric cardiologist and refer children who aren't seeing one to the care they need. When you do, your impact can last long beyond their visit to the emergency room!

Use these talking points to help start the conversation.

1. Find out if pediatric patients have heart defects

“Has your child ever had any heart problems? For example, did they ever have heart surgery or take medicine for their heart? If they did, I want to make sure they get the care they need to stay healthy.”

It's important to ask if children have a history of heart problems. This is especially true for children with signs or symptoms that could indicate a congenital heart defect — like trouble breathing, chest pain, or a chest scar. When you learn that a child has a heart defect, ask their parent or caregiver if the child is seeing a pediatric cardiologist.

2. Explain why children with heart defects need to see a pediatric cardiologist

“Heart defects last for a lifetime, even after heart surgery. Heart defects can also get worse over time — but they may not cause symptoms right away. That's why children with heart defects need to see a pediatric cardiologist regularly.”

Parents and caregivers may not realize their child needs to see a pediatric cardiologist — especially if the child has been feeling healthy. Explain that symptoms can develop over time and that pediatric cardiologists can catch problems early to help make sure children stay healthy.

3. Describe what a pediatric cardiologist does

“A pediatric cardiologist is a doctor who's trained to treat heart problems in children. They know how to tell if a heart problem is getting worse and how to help children with heart defects stay healthy.”

Some parents and caregivers may not understand why children with heart defects need to see a specialist, so it's important to explain what a pediatric cardiologist does. Emphasize that pediatric cardiologists know more about heart defects in children than anyone else — including which medicines or procedures children may need.

4. Tell parents and caregivers you can make a referral

“I can refer your child to a pediatric cardiologist to make sure they’re getting the care they need.”

Navigating the health care system can be overwhelming and stressful for patients and their families — so reassure them that they’re not alone. Tell them you can help them find a pediatric cardiologist.

Social Media Graphic 1

Graphic Text

As an emergency room physician, you can help make sure people born with heart defects see a congenital cardiologist — so they don't need to see you!

Social Media Posts

Twitter

- As an ER physician, you have an important role to play in connecting people with heart defects to congenital cardiac care. Find congenital cardiologists in your area to refer your patients: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory [@AmerAcadPeds](https://twitter.com/AmerAcadPeds) #CHD #ACHD #CHDCare4Life
- Patients with heart defects may not be getting the cardiac care they need. [@AmerAcadPeds](https://twitter.com/AmerAcadPeds) has tips to help ER physicians talk to patients with heart defects about getting #CHDCare4Life: <https://bit.ly/3zyRFvI> #CHD

Facebook

- As an ER physician, you have a unique touchpoint with people who have congenital heart defects. Ask patients with heart defects if they're getting regular congenital cardiac care — and refer patients who aren't. Find congenital cardiologists in your area: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory [@American Academy of Pediatrics](https://twitter.com/AmericanAcademyofPediatrics) #CHD #ACHD #CHDCare4Life
- When patients with heart defects visit the ER for any reason, take the opportunity to talk to them — or their caregivers — about the importance of getting congenital cardiac care. [@American Academy of Pediatrics](https://twitter.com/AmericanAcademyofPediatrics) has tips for starting the conversation: <https://bit.ly/3NXbxNj> #CHD #CHDCare4Life

LinkedIn

- Do you ever see people with heart defects in the ER? [@American Academy of Pediatrics](https://twitter.com/AmericanAcademyofPediatrics) is asking you to refer them to a congenital cardiologist so they can get the care they need to stay healthy. Find congenital cardiologists in your area so you can refer your patients: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory #CHD #ACHD #CHDCare4Life
- As an ER physician, you play a key role in helping people with heart defects avoid emergency care! Talk to them — or their caregivers — about the importance of lifelong congenital cardiac care. [@American Academy of Pediatrics](https://twitter.com/AmericanAcademyofPediatrics) has tips for starting the conversation: <https://bit.ly/3NXbxNj> #CHD #CHDCare4Life

Social Media Graphic 2

Graphic Text

Connect patients born with heart defects to congenital cardiac care. When you do, your impact will last long beyond their visit to the emergency room!

Social Media Posts

Twitter

- #DYK? Many people with congenital heart defects aren't getting the cardiac care they need. [@AmerAcadPeds](#) wants ER physicians to refer patients with heart defects to #CHDCare4Life. Find congenital cardiologists in your area: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory #CHD #ACHD
- ER physicians play a key role in connecting people with heart defects to congenital cardiac care! [@AmerAcadPeds](#) has tips for talking to people with heart defects about getting #CHDCare4Life: <https://bit.ly/3zyRFvI> #CHD

Facebook

- People with heart defects need lifelong congenital cardiac care, but many of them aren't getting it. As an ER physician, you can help change that by referring patients with heart defects to a congenital cardiologist. Find congenital cardiologists in your area: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory [@American Academy of Pediatrics](#) #CHD #ACHD #CHDCare4Life
- When you talk to patients in the ER about their health history, ask if they've ever had heart problems. When you find out someone has a heart defect, stress the importance of getting regular congenital cardiac care. [@American Academy of Pediatrics](#) has tips for starting the conversation: <https://bit.ly/3zyRFvI> #CHD #CHDCare4Life

LinkedIn

- People with heart defects need lifelong congenital cardiac care, but many of them aren't getting it. As an ER physician, you can help change that! Ask patients with heart defects if they're seeing a congenital cardiologist — and refer them if they're not. Find congenital cardiologists in your area: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory [@American Academy of Pediatrics](#) #CHD #ACHD #CHDCare4Life
- Did you know? Many people with heart defects aren't getting congenital cardiac care. When you talk to ER patients about their health history, ask if they've ever had heart problems. If you find out someone has a heart defect, stress the importance of lifelong congenital cardiac care. [@American Academy of Pediatrics](#) has tips for starting the conversation: <https://bit.ly/3zyRFvI> #CHD #CHDCare4Life